

## APPLICATION OF REGISTER THEORY IN LITERARY TRANSLATION –A CASE STUDY OF THE TRANSLATION OF *THE SECOND WORLD WAR*

TING YUAN

*School of Foreign Studies, Jinan University, West Huangpu Avenue, Guangzhou, China*

### ABSTRACT

*Based on register theory, this present study analyses the translation of *The Second World War* printed by Time Literature and Art Press of China, and it points out the inappropriate translation which violates the maxim of register equivalence (including field equivalence, tenor equivalence and mode equivalence) and retranslates the inappropriate translation. As a positive result, it puts forward some effective ways to realize register equivalence, which include thick translation, explanation translation, change of sentence order, adding conjunction, change of sentence type and voice, and using related terms. Through the qualitative analysis on the translation of literature texts, this paper proves the feasibility and advantages of register theory by taking the register equivalence into consideration and analyzing the process of retaining the register equivalence in the concrete texts, with the hope to be helpful for Chinese learners who are interested in literary translation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *The Second World War, Register Theory, Register Equivalence & Literary Translation*

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### INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a trend of literary translation being studied from different perspectives, taking into considerations culture, society and philosophy. Some scholars study translation focusing on the larger issues of context, history and convention, namely from the culture perspective (Bassnett & Lefevere 1990; Spivak 2000; Simon 1995). Also, some have made contributions from the perspective of society. They call for the visibility of translators and the employment of foreignizing strategy, and point out the value of sociological approach to literary translation (Venuti 1995; Gouaniv 2005; Chesterman 2006). Philosophy researchers have studied the interattraction of translation and philosophy, especially Continental School (Steiner 1998; Derrida 1985; Scott 2011, 2012). Besides, the linguistic approaches to literary translation center on such linguistic issues as meaning and equivalence. The functional linguistics, whose idea about language is beyond the scope of structure and into the context, features the works of Catford (1965), Baker (1992), and Hatim & Mason (1990, 1997). Functional linguists view equivalence as “meaning some level of sameness (in form, effect, content, etc.) between the original and its translation” (Snell-Hornby 1988:42). And the linguistics approaches provide a new look for literary translation, and is of great significance.

Through the qualitative analysis, the present study would explore the translation of *The Second World War* printed by Time Literature and Art Press of China based on register theory proposed by Halliday (1978:110) in systemic functional linguistics, with the hope to be helpful for Chinese learners who are interested in literary translation, and prove the feasibility and advantages of register theory by taking the register equivalence into

consideration.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Register Theory**

The concept of register comes under the larger concept of language variation in applied linguistics (Ghadessy, 1988). The term “register” was first put forward by Reid during his study on diglossia. He holds that for the linguistic behavior of a given individual is by no means uniform. He will, on different occasions speak (or write) differently according to what may roughly be described as different social situations: he will use a number of distinct registers (Ure & Ellis 1977). Later, Halliday (ibid) holds that linguistic situation types are enormously different from one another in three aspects: first, what is actually taking place; secondly, who is taking part; and thirdly, what part the language is playing. These three variables, which determine the range within which meanings are selected and the forms that are used for their expression, determine the “register”.

According to Halliday’s register theory, register consists of field, mode and tenor. Field refers to “what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place; what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures function as an essential component” (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 12). And mode is “what part the language is playing” (ibid) and its functions in different text styles like persuasive, expository and didactic. From their point of view, tenor is “who is taking part, to the nature of the participants”, including their status and attitudes, the relationship between the participants and their speech roles (ibid). Field, mode and tenor are the three variables that matter, because they are the three kinds of meanings, the language is structured to make (Eggins 1994: 76). In translation, translators should comply with the register equivalence to make sure these original meanings and feelings are conveyed accurately.

### **Register Equivalence**

The register approach has not found much application in translation studies until the 1990s when translation theorists realized the nature of translation as “a textual thing” (House 1981: 65), a cross-cultural communication which is both “socially and culturally necessary and useful” (Gregory, 2001: 19). According to Munday (2001: 89-102), in the 1990s discourse analysis came to prominence in translation studies and the model of discourse analysis that has had the greatest influence is Halliday’s systemic functional model. The application of register theory in translation is, actually, the realization of register equivalence between the source language and the target language.

Jakobson (1959) is the first to use the concept of “equivalence” in translation and proposes the notion of “equivalence in difference”. He denied the existence of equivalence between “code-units”, but acknowledged that procedures such as loanwords and semantic shifts can be employed to make up for the deficiency. Nida (1964, 1969, and 1986) puts forward two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and functional equivalence from the concepts in semantics, pragmatics and Chomsky’s generative-transformational grammar. Formal equivalence, namely the formal correspondence (Nida & Taber 1969: 22-8), “focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content”, while functional equivalence is based upon “the principle of equivalent effect” (1964: 159). According to Munday (2001: 42), Nida holds that “the success of translation depends above all on achieving equivalent response”. Newmark (1981) defines semantic translation as “attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original”, highlighting the realization of equivalence to some degree, and terms communicative translation as “attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the

readers of the original”.

Register analysis is one of the effective tools to analyze the text. Robinson (2014) also holds that register theory plays an unreplaceable role in translation. Actually, register equivalence is regarded as one of the prerequisite of a successful translation (Wu & He 2008:83). In *Discourse and the Translator*, Hatim and Mason (2001: 56) regarded register equivalence as the major factor in translation. Problems involved in translating one text into another language include locating equivalent terminology in the appropriate field, and achieving target language expression in the appropriate tenor and mode.

### **Violation of Register Equivalence in Translation**

In this part, register analysis shall be applied to the related translation, combined with the three metafunctions and their realization through the corresponding expression, in an attempt to discover how register equivalence will condition the translation of contracts. And “Ex.” is used to stand for “example”; “OT” stands for “original translation”; “RT” stands for “revised translation”. This paper will take the field equivalence, tenor equivalence and mode equivalence into consideration.

### **Violation of Field Equivalence in Translation**

The field is the total event, in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer; it thus includes the subject-matter as one element in it (Halliday 2001: 22). The field of a text is associated with ideational meaning, namely the accurate understanding of the semantic meaning of the text, which is realized through transitivity patterns (verb types, active/passive structures, participants in the process, etc.) (Egins 1994: 78). While translating, translators should pay attention to the topic and the genre of the text to avoid mistranslation.

Ex. (1): Spring Warnings – The German Blood Purge of June 30 – The End of Disarmament – The Murder of Doctor Dollfuss, July 25

OT : 春季的警兆——7月30日德国的血腥清洗——裁军会议的结束——7月25日多尔富斯博士遇害

RT : 春日的警报——6月30日德军血腥清洗——裁军结束——7月25日陶尔斐斯<sup>1</sup>遇刺身亡

注<sup>1</sup> : 陶尔斐斯, 即恩格尔伯特·陶尔斐斯(1892—1934), 奥地利第14任内阁总理(1932—1934), 基督教社会党首领, 1932年起任总理兼外交部长, 任内解散国会; 镇压奥地利工人和舒茨本德领导武装起义。后因反对德国吞并奥地利, 1934年在维也纳的总理官邸被德国支持的奥地利纳粹党徒刺死。

First, in original translation, it fails to realize field equivalence for it mistranslates the original text. In example (1), “Spring Warnings” has been translated into “警兆”, but according to the BCC established by BLCU Corpus Center, there are only four sentences using “警兆”, which shows that “警兆” is not typical in Chinese, and fails to maintain the accurate semantic meaning of “Spring Warnings”. In revised translation, it has been changed into “警报”, which occurs 6,874 times in BCC, and “警报” keeps in line with the original meaning and accords with the expression of Chinese habit. Second, in original translation, “Dollfuss” has been transliterated into “多尔富斯”, while the name of this person has been a proper noun for he is the 14th prime minister of Austria, so in revised translation, it has been changed into “陶尔斐斯”, which is acknowledged by Chinese. Besides, revised translation explains “陶尔斐斯” with notes, demonstrating his

identity, the relationship with the Second World War and Nazi, and the reason why he was murdered. Also, the translation of “Murder” has been changed into “遇刺身亡” to show how he was murdered. The revised translation employs the thick translation to realize field equivalence to help readers understand the original text more easily and clearly. Thick translation was first proposed by Apiah (1993), and Baker (1992) also pointed out that translators could add some redundant information to make meaning conveyed more clearly and lighten readers’ cognitive load. He also held that translators could add annotation and commentary in translation so that readers could appreciate and understand the original culture and the way of thinking better. Thick translation often consists of literal translation and annotation, and both of them guarantee the semantic meaning of the original text. Third, there is a mistranslation in original translation, which should be “6月30号”, rather than “7月30号”. In translation, mistranslation should avoid.

Ex. (2): This front will be constantly nourished and expanded, and we hope to include later the Brest peninsula.

OT: 这条战线将不断得到补给和扩大, 希望随后能将布雷斯特半岛也纳入其中。

RT: 并不断补给和扩大此战线。同时希望盟军随后也能占据布雷斯特半岛。

In example (2), the sentence underlined is passive, and the original translation also keeps in line with the passive structure marked by “得到”, and the subject is “this front”. In revised translation, “this front” is changed into object, highlighting the initiative of army. Also, the phrase “include later the Brest peninsula”, in fact, has been changed into “占据布雷斯特半岛”, which changes the passive structure of the original translation into an active structure, making the meaning more clear and comply with the habit that Chinese is featured by active structures. The change of voice is also one way to keep field equivalence.

### Violation of Tenor Equivalence in Translation

The tenor refers to the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved (Halliday 2001:22). The tenor of a text is associated with interpersonal meaning, which is realized through the patterns of modality (modal verbs, adverbs, evaluative lexis, etc.) (ibid).

Ex. (3): Either Kesselring’s forces will be routed, in which case it should be possible to undertake a rapid regrouping and a pursuit towards the Ljubljana Gap (and across the Alps through the Brenner Pass), leaving a small force to clear up Northwest Italy;

OT: 如果击溃了凯塞林的武装力量, 那么就有可能迅速重组力量, 并向卢布尔雅山峡进发 (从勃伦纳山口越过阿尔卑斯山), 一小部分力量留在意大利的西北部扫清残余势力;

RT: 如果击溃了凯塞林的武装力量, 那么我军必须迅速重组武装力量, 并向卢布尔雅山峡进发 (从勃伦纳山口越过阿尔卑斯山), 一小部分力量留在意大利西北部扫清残余势力;

The modal verbs “should” is translated into “有可能”, which shows a kind of possibility, whereas this is plan or command according to the context. So the original translation fails to realize the mode equivalence for the different modality. In revised translation, it adopts “必须”, which emphasizes the urgency of the situation and realize the tenor equivalence.

Ex. (4): Once firmly established there, his troops could thrust northward and meet the Fourteenth Army. This was

an excellent idea.

OT：他的部队一旦在那儿站稳了脚跟，就能够向北推进，与第十四集团军会师。这是一个很好的主意。

RT：他的部队一旦进驻仰光，便可北进与第十四集团军会合。真是个完美的计划！

In original text, the sentence “This was an excellent idea.” is a statement, and the original translation is also statement, but it fails to convey the excited feeling of army. So in revised translation, it has been changed into “真是个完美的计划！”，which is an exclamatory sentence revealing the happy and excited feeling of the author and army for the plan’s smooth implementation. In translation, translators should take the context into consideration to express the accurate feeling of the original text and to realize the tenor equivalence.

### **Violation of Mode Equivalence in Translation**

The mode is the function of the text in the event, including therefore both the channel taken by the language—spoken or written, extempore or prepared—and its genre, or rhetorical mode, as narrative, didactic, persuasive, “phatic communion” and so on (ibid). The mode of a text is associated with textual meaning, which is realized through the thematic and information structures (mainly the order and structuring of elements in a clause) and cohesion (the way the text hangs together lexically, including the use of pronouns, ellipsis, collocation, repetition, etc.) (ibid).

Ex. (5): Hitler Head of the German State, August 1

OT：8月2日希特勒成为德国元首

RT：8月1日希特勒出任国家元首

While translating this sentence, we should notice that this is a literature work and has military features. Thus, this sentence, the subheading of the text, should be concise, and should use military terms. And the original translation adopts “成为”, which means “become”, not conveying any special hidden meaning. While in revised translation, “出任” means “take up the post of”, which is more official and formal. “出任国家元首” keep in line with the military style of the text and realizes the mode equivalence.

Ex. (6): He considers his best opportunity of defeating the enemy in the West lies in striking at the Ruhr and Saar, since he is convinced that the enemy will concentrate the remainder of his available forces in the defense of these essential areas.

OT：他认为击败西线敌军的最佳机会取决于对鲁尔河及萨尔河发动攻击，因为他相信敌人会将有生力量集中在防御这些中心地区。

RT：他认为敌军会集中所有力量防守鲁尔河及萨尔河军事重地，如果我们先对它们发动进攻，那么敌军必定在劫难逃。

The original translation keeps the basic information of the original text, while the statement is not smooth, and the logic is confusing, and lexical cohesion is not right, failing to realize the mode equivalence. In revised translation, the sentence order has been changed, and the addition of conjunctions demonstrates the causal relationship of these two sentences. In addition to adding conjunctions, cohesion can be realized also by reference, substitution, ellipsis so that mode

equivalence can be realized.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present thesis is an attempt to apply the register theory in the Hallidayan systemicfunctional linguistics to the study of literary translation. By analyzing the equivalence of various aspects of the field, tenor, and mode of the translation of *The Second World War*, this paper has carried out a fairly comprehensive and in-depth study into literary translation. In translation, translators could adopt thick translation, explanation translation to realize field equivalence, and adopt change of sentence order, type and voice to realize tenor equivalence, and adopt adding conjunction and use related terms to realize mode equivalence. The present study of the application of register theory of literary translation hopes to make contributions to proving the feasibility and advantages of register theory by taking the register equivalence into consideration and analyzing the process of retaining the register equivalence in the concrete texts, with the desire to be helpful for Chinese learners who are interested in literary translation.

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